

THE POCAHONTAS TIMES

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CALVIN W. PRICE, Editor.

THURSDAY JUNE 22, 1924

Five years ago they got one toe, and last Thursday, June 5, 1924, they went back and collected the remainder of the Source of Elk River, a big black bear that has needed killing for a long time.

He may have been a pretty good bear in his time but mutton was his curse, and by the time that he had killed this spring alone fifteen sheep for W. E. Poage, and forebore to leave the vicinity, the neighborhood rose up, took a day off, and exterminated Lame Paw, the Outlaw.

Hears have no recorded land titles. They take up a range and hold it as long as they can. They hold for their own use and benefit all and sundry nuts, berries, nettles, grubs, worms, ants, honey, fish, fowl, and fowl, and when their holdings lie far back in the woods they have no particular trouble with mankind. But on the edge of the wilderness where the only enemy that they fear has cleared and fenced are the delectable lands, that are only taken over by the oldest, boldest, biggest and wisest bears. These bears become well known and they become the object of the farmer's wrath, for they develop into sheep stealers and they work at night. Strychnine that accounted for the wolves and the panthers is no good against bears for bears are not carnivorous animals, and strychnine does not greatly discomode them. Either they are able to detect it or they assimilate it without the deadly effect that this poison has on all strictly meat eating animals.

The edges of the forest afford the best range for bears and when one takes to using there he becomes a very unpopular member of the community. In some states the life of the bear is protected by the game laws, and it almost causes the mountain farmer who is being preyed upon by the cunning old bear to burst a blood vessel when he reads of the foolishness of legislatures that say that they shall not be killed.

A bear cannot be indicted and tried for crime, and if he cannot be cramed with powder and ball what becomes of the individual right of the sheep raiser to protect his property? The only way that the bear can pay for the damage he has done is with his meat and hide, and in this country sooner or later, the farmer collects.

Five years ago Lame Paw stepped into a steel trap and left a toe to show who had been there and the toe was hung up and after that the big track registered the identity of the animal. He had been making his home on Gibson's Knob. This is not the highest peak in these mountains but it is well up in the forty odd hundred feet and in a way it is one of the most spectacular features of the landscape. It has been cleared on the top and forms a long mound covered with blue grass. There is a considerable flat on its top and a few stunted trees there show signs of the fierce winds that blow over the exposed surface. There has been well authenticated cases of this height making visitors there so dizzy that they have fallen prone and held to the grass to keep from falling off.

The mountain is encircled on every side by blue grass farms and it is the center of one of the richest grazing countries in West Virginia.

County roads enclose it. Starting at Edray and following the pike to Linwood, and turning there and traversing the road to Clover Creek and thence by Poage's Lane and Warwick and back to Edray a circle of thirty three miles. That day's journey will show a traveler the greenest, grassiest place in the Virginias. When I was in the postal service, it was the constant aim to make that circle around Gibson's Knob a daily rural route and time and again the department agreed to establish such a route but there was always some local objection as to the way it affected individuals that kept it from being done. That pivoting on Gibson's Knob through that rich country always appeared very strongly to me:

I have tried to get a list of men who made up the hunt the other day after Lame Paw, and I talked to some of the men and I was told of twelve men and twelve hounds that made up the hunt, but I have a feeling that some were left out of the list. And in addition to that every man on every side of Gibson's Knob had a bear load in his gun and was ready to fire.

The twelve I listed were: Charles Sheets, James Gibson, Robert Gibson, Willie Gibson, Dallas Tacy, Charles Tacy, Another Tacy, Doc Gibson, W. E. Poage, Ross Hamrick, Carl Gibson, French Hoover. Added later, Henry Simmons, Amos Wood-dell, Elmer Hannah, Roscoe Bennett, sixteen in all.

Of the twelve hounds, two were heroes, Roamy, belonging to James Gibson, and Liner, belonging to Dallas Tacy.

The standers were placed and the hounds taken to the top of Gibson's Knob, and there in the bear wallow was fresh sign of the bear. The hounds were loosed and within a hundred and fifty yards they jumped the big bear and another from their beds in a Wind Shake Fall near a laurel patch. Lame Paw's companion in crime lit out from there as fast as he could lay foot to the ground and took with him ten hounds and so far as known is going yet. It was a part of the cunning of the ancient bear no doubt to have a young racing bear handy to draw off such dangers as this.

But Roamy and Liner had been conferring over the matter and they knew very well that the small bear was not the main object of the hunt. If it had not been for these wise dogs, the whole pack would have been drawn away after the subservient bear that Lame Paw kept for the purpose and Lame Paw would have been left with his head on his paws brooding over the endless expanse

that surrounded his high look out.

But Roamy and Liner prodded him out. Lame Paw was too old and fat to enjoy running but he decided that he would have to waddle his feet if he got to Gauley Mountain and away from the dogs, men and guns.

He could not do any thing with the hounds. One good swipe of his paw would crush a hound, but the hounds side stepped and kept out of the way. They also kept him from fleeing rapidly. One hung on one flank of the big bear and one on the other. Each dog picked the hind leg that he was to chew and paid attention to it. When Roamy bit the leg assigned to him, the bear would stop to cuff him out, and Liner would then fasten on, leg left exposed and the big brute was much harried and distressed.

The hounds in the meantime were giving tongue and letting the hunters know the way the game was taking. The bear circled and ran about two miles until he made his last stand in the rough ground on the south side of Russell Hannah's farm near the passway towards Slaty Fork.

The chase came near the places where James Gibson and Charles Sheets were standing, and the hunters who were close together both started to run to the hounds, for they could tell that the hunt had passed them and that the bear was at bay fighting the hounds. The two hunters ran in company a mile or more, but there was this difference: James Gibson is sixty-eight years old, and after the first mile finds that his age somewhat affects him though still sound in wind and limb. Charles Sheets is in his twenties and does not mind how far he has to run. Seeing Mr Gibson slow up in the foot race, Mr Sheets slowed up also and said that he would wait and go on with Mr Gibson at a slower pace.

Mr. Gibson thanked him for his courtesy but observed that it was so important to get that particular bear that it would be just as well for Mr. Sheets to proceed to the place where the bear was raising the devil with the hounds, and not to stand on ceremony, so Mr. Sheets came to the bear.

Lame Paw, twelve inches between the ears, was trying to put his paw on the dog, and when the paw came down the dog was elsewhere. Sheets had the following equipment: A Winchester, repeating shotgun, with shell loaded with an ounce ball. It seems that of late years, the man that carries a twelve gauge shotgun that uses shells each containing an ounce of small shot, may buy at the hardware stores shells in which each has an ounce ball and this ball cartridge when shot from such a shotgun has about the same range as an old time mountain rifle, and it is very effective ammunition for deer and bear.

The bear and dogs were fussing around in a grown up hacking and Sheets was able to shoot Lame Paw twice before the harassed bear knew that his enemy was on him. One of the ounce ball went through the body near the heart and the other entered near the backbone and ranged back to the ham. The bear then went on and the dogs showed their perfect team work, each tugging at a haug; and dodging and coming again.

Sheets followed but for a time it was not possible to shoot on account of the prevalence of the hounds and Sheets having plenty of speed ran round the bear and took his position on a rocky place in a cleft in the cliffs where the bears must pass. And out of the brush the big brute came, and as it happened, he had got rid of the dogs for the time being.

Now a bear being the wisest and most timid of animals where man is concerned will not come in shouting distance of if he can help it, but when cornered or attacked there is no animal as dangerous and as hard to stop with a ball. This is what caused them to call the grizzly Ursus Ferocis, or the Bear Ferocious. And when a black bear gets as big as a grizzly in this case, it is probably the most dangerous of all wild animals: A rugged rushing bear has a tendency to make any man give ground.

In this case the bear desperately wounded but with all his power left made directly at the hunter as fast as he could lay his feet to the ground, and the hunter refusing to be a consenting party to his own destruction, in the space of a fraction of a second took aim and shot Lame Paw square between the eyes, and the big hant was over.

On being examined, the worn condition of the teeth indicated an old bear. It was as fat as fat could be, and the meat was good, to those that like bear meat. Owing to the late spring the hide was in perfect condition, the hair being thick, long, black and glossy.

The bear is thought to have weighed about five hundred pounds, and is the second largest bear that has been killed on the waters of Elk, and that is saying a good deal for there have been hundreds if not thousands killed in those fine bear grounds.

The largest bear was fourteen inches between the ears, and was the famous Williams River sheep killing bear killed on Elk in 1910 by Samuel Gibson. He was generally referred to as the Old Hellion, and he used on Williams River and Elk River for years and actually put some farmers out of the sheep business. That was the time when farmers hung up lanterns on their farms at night.

On the 30th day of April, 1910, as near as we can figure out, Old Hellion visited the Old Field Fork of Elk and killed three sheep and eat his fill and left a sheep for further reference in the woods on the Gauley side of Elk about half a mile from Sam Gibson's house on the river.

Gibson had a bear trap that weighed sixty pounds and he set it at a place that the bear would pass in going to the sheep and then stied three guns near the trap. That was the first day of May.

That night at 11 o'clock Gibson thought he heard the sound of a gun, and he got up and went on the porch and discussed with other members of the family who were awake whether he had really heard a shot or not. And as he stood there, the two other guns boomed out in an unmistakable

manner. The guns set had been a 32 Winchester, a 44 Winchester, and a Winchester shotgun.

The question then before the house was whether it was the proper thing to go to the place at once or wait the slow coming of daylight. The sensible thing to do seemed to be to wait until morning, and if Old Hellion was dead the carcass would be there in the morning, and if he was not dead he was no fit and proper person to meet up with at midnight. But Gibson had still another gun, another 44 Winchester, that he could rely upon, and he took a lantern and went forth to see what all the shooting was about.

All was quiet until he got almost to the spot and then there was a terrible commotion. The bear had got the trap on a front foot and had been shot three times, and had tried to go away and had traveled some twenty or thirty feet into a thicket and there the drag on the trap had caught in a root and anchored the brute.

When the hunter came near, the bear commenced to thrash about in the brush and beat the sixty pound trap on the logs in a frenzied manner, and growl and snort, so that the family at the house anxiously listening a half mile away could hear plainly.

Gibson was there in the mountain in the night time, and he could not see the bear or tell just what was going on. He could not understand why the bear did not come out of the thicket and the gun too, but about that time a bright moon came up and shone on the scene.

Gibson decided to go into the thicket and shoot the bear that by this time was crouching somewhere just out of sight. Never was a man in more danger. He got to a place in the brush when he was within a few feet of the bear. The bear raised on his hind feet so close to the hunter that the hunter felt the chain of the trap come up between his legs and there within a gun's length of him stood the bear ready to fall on him, and the hunter raised his gun and shot the bear through the heart, and the great brute fell down dead at the hunter's feet.

This bear was estimated to weigh six hundred pounds. The hide was eight feet six inches long by seven feet six inches wide, and it is probably the biggest and best bear hide ever taken in this country. It is now a rug in the office of Dr. Parr, Martins Ferry, Ohio.

The record showed that the bear had come for the sheep and had stepped in the trap and that had set off the spring gun shooting the 44 ball. This shot had hit the bear in the jaw. Then as he struggled with the trap, he let off the shotgun that had hit him behind the shoulder but had not penetrated the cavity of the body. The 32 guh had hit the bear squarely behind the ear, and the ball lay flattened against the skull.

The fact that the old time mountain rifle would not shock a bear sufficiently to stop it unless the shot penetrated the brain or the heart, made bear chasing a sport that depended upon the strategy of the bear dog. The hunter had to be greatly favored to be able to kill a brute. If the bear took to a tree it was not particularly difficult, but the biggest and most dangerous bears would not tree from hounds, and if a shot came from a mountain rifle it generally resulted in the bear going away from that place and being lost. So the old time hunters who got the most bears had a habit of carrying very large and sharp hunting knives and when a bear was bayed they would go in and stab the bear to the heart by reaching over the back and using the knife on the opposite side from that on which they stood. In this way the bear struck from them and did not harm them, whereas, if they had stabbed from the other side on which they stood the bear would have ripped them up with a stroke of the paw.

This country we are writing about is where the late Hugh Sharp lived his long and interesting life. He was a prosperous farmer, but his pleasures consisted of bears and bees. He hunted the first and cherished the last. He had many bear scalps to his name. He was a great friend of John Phillips, of Fairmont, and it was here that John Phillips came bearing all the earmarks of a tenderfoot on his first visit. About the time he arrived, a deer fleeing before the hounds came, flashing by the house and Phillips shot five times with a rifle and hit the deer each time and brought it down. Next day he shot mark with the local hunters and beat them all. He happened to be a crack shot and he could shoot all around the local talent, and so he made good with them and was accepted into the brotherhood.

How the account stands.

L. P. Bear	
In account with	Man & Co
To sheep destroyed in 8 yrs.	\$8000.00
By hide and meat	100.00
Balance	\$7900.00
Total	\$8000.00

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The Board of Review and Equalization of Pocahontas County, West Virginia, will meet at the Court House thereof, on Thursday the 12th day of June, 1924 for the purpose of reviewing and equalizing the assessment of the county as returned by the Assessor of said County for the year 1924 as required by law.

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County Court of said County.

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